

Johnny McRight 3/27/2025

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF MISSISSIPPI  
NORTHERN DIVISION

SHAWN MACKEY

PLAINTIFF

V. CAUSE NO. 3:23-CV-233-DPJ-ASH

JOHN PIGOTT, IN HIS INDIVIDUAL  
AND OFFICIAL CAPACITIES;  
CHERYL THURMOND, IN HER  
INDIVIDUAL AND OFFICIAL  
CAPACITIES; VIDET CARMICHAEL,  
IN HIS INDIVIDUAL AND OFFICIAL  
CAPACITIES; DINNIE CAUGHMAN,  
IN HIS INDIVIDUAL AND OFFICIAL  
CAPACITIES; BUBBA HUDSPETH, IN  
HIS INDIVIDUAL AND OFFICIAL  
CAPACITIES; DOLLY MARASCALO,  
IN HER INDIVIDUAL AND OFFICIAL  
CAPACITIES; JOHNNY MCRIGHT, IN  
HIS INDIVIDUAL AND OFFICIAL  
CAPACITIES; LUKE MONTGOMERY,  
IN HIS INDIVIDUAL AND OFFICIAL  
CAPACITIES; WILL SYMMES, IN  
HIS INDIVIDUAL AND OFFICIAL  
CAPACITIES; DIANNE WATSON, IN  
HER INDIVIDUAL AND OFFICIAL  
CAPACITIES; AND THE  
MISSISSIPPI COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
BOARD

DEFENDANTS

CONTINUATION DEPOSITION OF JOHNNY MCRIGHT

Taken at the instance of the Plaintiff at Attorney  
General, Civil Litigation Division, 550 High Street,  
Suite 1100, Jackson, Mississippi 39205, on  
Thursday, March 27, 2025, beginning at 1:23 p.m.

NIKKI L. LLOYD, CCR #1870

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1           versus what we're doing. It looked like some  
2           of our work was going to be taken away and the  
3           workforce, which Dr. Mackey and -- oh, shoot --  
4           one of the other guys were very heavily  
5           involved in. And, you know, in the midst of  
6           all of that, I was flat out told directly that  
7           we were not going to be able to pay the kind of  
8           money that had been paid to the executive  
9           director. So there was a lot going on there  
10          that made us realize that we needed to do  
11          something different --

12          Q        (By Ms. Ross) Right. But --

13          A.       -- to try to keep things together to be  
14          honest with you. I mean, it was a -- it was a bad  
15          time. And I think -- I blame a lot of it on COVID,  
16          quite frankly, because we were not meeting. IHL  
17          shut the building down. We had to do things by Zoom  
18          for I don't know how many months. All of that was  
19          going on during that time.

20          Q.       So you never told me why y'all vote --  
21          why, you know, the Board believed that it was  
22          necessary to lower the standards for the executive  
23          director's position.

24                   MS. DOWDLE: Object to the form.

25                   THE WITNESS: There's no specific answer.

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1           There is a group of answers. One, we were told  
2           we weren't going to be able to pay that kind of  
3           money in the future. I was told that very  
4           directly by the Lieutenant Governor.

5           Q       (By Ms. Ross) What Lieutenant Governor?

6           Who was the Lieutenant --

7           A.     Delbert Hosemann.

8           Q.     Okay.

9           A.     He called me and he was very specific  
10          about it.

11          Q.     Okay.

12          A.     I'll be honest, when he told me that, I  
13          did not realize that Mayfield was making that much  
14          money.

15          Q.     Well, how much was she making?

16          A.     It was like 300-.

17          Q.     And when Kell came in as an interim, he  
18          was making 210-, correct?

19          A.     Do what?

20          Q.     When Kell came in as interim, he was  
21          making \$210,000 a year, correct?

22          A.     He was doing three jobs.

23          Q.     Okay. Well --

24          A.     Three different jobs at the time. We  
25          asked him to do that. And I don't remember who led

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1 I'm looking at too many different versions of the  
2 same thing.

3 Q. But -- and when you were creating these  
4 documents and e-mailing them --

5 A. I didn't create -- I didn't create these.

6 Q. Well, it certainly appears that you did  
7 from the e-mail.

8 MS. DOWDLE: Object to the form.

9 Q (By Ms. Ross) Okay. Is your e-mail that  
10 has the attachments the same thing that's in the  
11 heading of this letter, qualifications for MCCB  
12 executive director have been altered, correct? Can  
13 you read what the attachment says, what it says on  
14 the attachments?

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. Okay. What does it say?

17 A. It says the same thing, yes.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. Absolutely.

20 Q. And then read the body of it for the  
21 record out loud.

22 A. I thought already -- I didn't already do  
23 that?

24 Q. No.

25 A. FYI: See attached. Please let me know



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1 your thoughts on any changes, additions, deletions,  
2 et cetera. It is my intention to present this  
3 information to Tate, Delbert, Philip and anyone else  
4 you think we need to inform. Please note that this  
5 is what I feel we should do, but certainly not my  
6 decision, but yours. We can finalize and then let  
7 the search committee see it and give their thoughts.  
8 I was advised to put this in writing. Please note  
9 that this in no way mentions or suggests that this  
10 change was made in order to favor anyone in  
11 particular, and it should not. Thanks. I await  
12 your response. Johnny.

13 Q. Okay. So if Johnny (sic) had sent it to  
14 you, that e-mail that you sent Johnny wouldn't make  
15 any sense, would it?

16 A. I'm -- you mean, John? I'm Johnny.

17 Q. Yeah. If Johnny -- well, you're Johnny.  
18 And if Pigott had sent it to you, your e-mail  
19 wouldn't make any sense, right?

20 MS. DOWDLE: Object to the form.

21 Q (By Ms. Ross) If Pigott had drafted these  
22 letters and not you, your e-mail wouldn't make  
23 sense --

24 MS. DOWDLE: Object to the form.

25 Q (By Ms. Ross) -- would it?

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1 Governor Tate Reeves or -- and you said Philip Gunn,  
2 who spoke to them, you?

3 A. I spoke with Delbert Hosemann.

4 Q. Okay. But you said it was your intention  
5 to present it to both Delbert, Philip Gunn and  
6 Governor Reeves, correct?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Okay. What prevented you from presenting  
9 this information -- and when you said this  
10 information to Tate, Delbert and Philip, were you  
11 referring to 5 and 6?

12 A. I was referring -- well, I was referring  
13 to changing the qualifications.

14 Q. And the legislature didn't determine the  
15 qualifications -- well, I guess they could. In the  
16 statute, does the legislature list the  
17 qualifications for the executive director?

18 A. I don't know.

19 Q. So why were you bringing law -- lawmakers  
20 into discussions about what the qualifications  
21 should be?

22 A. Because I was told by one of them that we  
23 were not going to be able to pay what we had been  
24 paying in the past.

25 Q. Okay.

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1 you on the same day at 11:25 about the special  
2 requirements, and you see that where he says,  
3 Regarding special requirements, is there anything we  
4 want to delete or restate?

5 A. I see that.

6 Q. Okay. And was he referring to the  
7 executive director's job description?

8 A. I have no idea.

9 Q. When you responded to him at 3:00 on the  
10 same day, what did you put in the subject line?

11 A. At the very top of the document?

12 Q. Uh-huh, yes.

13 A. RE: MCCB executive director job  
14 description.

15 Q. I've just handed you a document. And you  
16 said you did not know what John was referring to  
17 when he said, Regarding the special requirements, is  
18 there anything we want to delete or restate? You  
19 wrote to him on April 6th of 2022 regarding the  
20 attached job description, correct?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. And read that first -- read that e-mail  
23 that you sent to -- on April 6th of 2020.

24 A. Attached is the executive director job  
25 description, including where I highlight in green

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1 the qualities I feel our guy definitely needs to  
2 meet and I feel certain he does. There's also one  
3 word highlighted in yellow due to some concern we  
4 have had about being tough enough. Thinking it back  
5 through, our past leader never terminated anyone.  
6 She just transferred their responsibilities and  
7 workload to someone else and moved them to an  
8 out-of-sight office location. Not much on firing,  
9 but who is really.

10 You want me to keep on?

11 Q. Yes.

12 A. I think the bigger question is whether the  
13 president is going to roughshod over our director.  
14 I just don't see that happening. Even if our new  
15 leader is somewhat of a passivist who does not like  
16 conflict, but with recent events that I hope he  
17 discussed with us, he certainly may want to and try,  
18 but not -- but does not run from conflict when  
19 necessary. Seeing that and how he has handled some  
20 staff issues is impressive. Let me know your  
21 thoughts when you can. I have not sent this to  
22 Cheryl, Luke or Bubba. Just my thinking today.

23 Q. So on the date that you wrote -- on  
24 April 6th of 2022, can you tell this jury under oath  
25 that you were not referring to a man as being --



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1 COURT REPORTER: That will be Exhibit 13.

2 (Exhibit 13 marked for identification.)

3 Q (By Ms. Ross) Sir, what made Kell more  
4 qualified for the position -- clearly more qualified  
5 for the position than Mackey?

6 A. Basically, that goes back to when we asked  
7 him to serve as the interim.

8 Q. Okay. So --

9 A. And we did that because we were highly  
10 concerned about the staff and about the relationship  
11 we had -- that our board had with the school  
12 presidents and -- there were a couple of things.  
13 First, I knew Mackey would probably apply for the  
14 permanent job, and I knew Kell wouldn't. I mean,  
15 Kell, number one, at that time, he wasn't qualified,  
16 didn't have a Ph.D. And so my position on that when  
17 some of them said, Let's do Kell, I liked the idea  
18 because we got somebody in the interim that's not  
19 going to, you know, try to sway things one way or  
20 the other in their favor if they are not -- if they  
21 ran, you know, or decided to apply. And what we saw  
22 very quickly was his capacity to mend bad  
23 relationships with the Board and the staff and the  
24 presidents, so that weighed very heavily in his  
25 favor to be quite honest with you.

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1 just telling you it weighed very heavily. It did.

2 Q. Well, would you say that the Board then  
3 had given Kell an advantage over Mackey because you  
4 can't say that Mackey couldn't have done the same  
5 things that Kell did, right?

6 MS. DOWDLE: Object to the form.

7 Q (By Ms. Ross) And the reason -- right, you  
8 can't say that, can you?

9 A. Ma'am, yes, I can. I mean, to be  
10 honest --

11 Q. Okay. How --

12 MS. DOWDLE: Allow him to finish.

13 MS. ROSS: Okay.

14 THE WITNESS: -- there were issues and  
15 concerns with Dr. Mackey being in that position  
16 within our -- within the Board.

17 Q (By Ms. Ross) Okay. And what were the  
18 issues and concerns?

19 A. That he was arrogant, that he was some  
20 sort -- somewhat of a bully, that he was difficult  
21 and that was -- and that was -- I would call that --  
22 in all fairness, I would call that other people's  
23 perspective on how he was. I mean, it's like, you  
24 know, some -- somebody's feeling about how somebody  
25 is doesn't necessarily mean that's how they are, but

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1 that's how they think they are, I guess is what I'm  
2 trying to say. There were concerns there.

3 Q. Okay. So now you're telling the ladies  
4 and gentlemen of the jury that y'all went out and --  
5 and -- the Board members, when you're doing --  
6 engaging in a confidential matter that is  
7 determinant, if Mackey is going to be given the  
8 position as executive director, you just went up and  
9 had side conversations with anybody who wants to  
10 talk about Mackey?

11 MS. DOWDLE: Object to the form.

12 THE WITNESS: No.

13 Q (By Ms. Ross) Okay. So who told you  
14 Mackey was arrogant?

15 A. First off, other board members told me  
16 about other people telling them.

17 Q. Okay. And for the record, all the Board  
18 members are white, right?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Okay. So who told you Mackey was  
21 arrogant? Did anyone tell you directly,  
22 Mr. McRight, that Mackey was arrogant?

23 A. I had someone -- I had people tell me --  
24 several people tell me that other people -- it would  
25 be secondary, you know, honestly, you know -- felt

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1 that way about it. And then I actually was  
2 concerned about it, and I tried to actually talk to  
3 some people that I knew in the staff to get them to  
4 tell me the same thing.

5 Q. Okay. So who told you that others had  
6 told them that Mackey was arrogant?

7 A. Other Board members.

8 Q. Okay. Who -- I'm trying to -- you know, I  
9 think it's ten of y'all.

10 A. Yes, ma'am.

11 Q. Did all nine of them tell you?

12 A. No.

13 Q. So which specific ones?

14 A. You want me to -- do I have to name who --

15 Q. Yes.

16 A. Diane, Luke, John, Dolly.

17 Q. You got four right now.

18 A. I better stop there. I'll stop there.

19 Q. Well, I don't want you to just stop there.  
20 If there is another board member who told you that  
21 Mackey was arrogant, you need to tell the ladies and  
22 gentlemen of the jury who it was.

23 MS. DOWDLE: Object to the form.

24 THE WITNESS: Well, I don't -- I don't  
25 know. I don't know. I don't remember. I



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1 Q (By Ms. Ross) And no one ever confronted  
2 Mackey with these things that people were saying,  
3 right?

4 A. Not to my knowledge. I didn't.

5 Q. I mean, the interview would have been a  
6 perfect place to do that, right? Mackey, we have  
7 these concerns because we keep hearing that you're  
8 arrogant -- arrogant, that you are a bully, that you  
9 are difficult to work with. You had an opportunity  
10 to go into those issues with him but did not,  
11 correct?

12 MS. DOWDLE: Object to the form.

13 THE WITNESS: Correct.

14 Q (By Ms. Ross) Okay. Were there any  
15 African American employees at the MCCB that you  
16 talked to who made any allegations against Mackey?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Who?

19 A. I'm not going there.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. Can I -- can I refuse to answer that  
22 question?

23 MS. DOWDLE: No. You need to answer the  
24 question.

25 THE WITNESS: Cynthia. I don't -- I'm

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1           sorry. I don't like this at all.

2           Q       (By Ms. Ross) And who else besides Cynthia  
3 Jiles?

4                   (Discussion off the record.)

5           THE WITNESS: I'm sorry. I'm trying --  
6 there was -- there was another lady. I  
7 cannot -- I'm sorry.

8           Q       (By Ms. Ross) What did Cynthia Jiles tell  
9 you about Mackey?

10          A.     That he was a bully.

11          Q.     He's a bully.

12          A.     (Nonverbal response.)

13          Q.     Now, she's the human resources person,  
14 right?

15          A.     Yes.

16          Q.     And if she identifies a bully in the  
17 workplace at MCCB, there are procedures to follow,  
18 correct?

19          A.     I would think so.

20          Q.     Okay. And did she ever show you any  
21 procedures or any written complaints that she  
22 received?

23          A.     Nope.

24          Q.     Okay. So if Mackey is a bully in the  
25 workplace, isn't it true that MCCB employees can

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1 Q. But not in public sector jobs, right?

2 A. Oh, public. I'm sorry. None. I hadn't  
3 had any experience in the public sector until I  
4 got -- got involved in this.

5 Q. So you said these reports, though, that  
6 came from the employees harmed Mackey's chances of  
7 being named executive director?

8 A. Yes, ma'am, they did.

9 Q. Okay. And, now, did you speak to -- did  
10 you ask any of the staff about Mackey?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Okay. Who did you ask about Mackey?

13 A. I tried -- I did -- I actually tried  
14 talking to several that wouldn't talk to me. And,  
15 golly, I had to get -- got Jason -- I finally got  
16 Jason to talk to me.

17 Q. Jason Carter?

18 A. Yes, ma'am.

19 Q. He's white?

20 A. Yes, ma'am.

21 Q. What did he say?

22 A. His concern was other staff members that  
23 were concerned.

24 Q. And who were the staff members who he  
25 claimed were concerned?

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1           A.    I do not know. He said there were  
2   several. And he said he was worried that -- and  
3   I'll tell you something, he did not want to talk to  
4   me. He did not. Neither he nor Cynthia wanted to  
5   talk to me. But I felt like somebody needed to get  
6   to the bottom of it. You know, what is the problem?  
7   If there's a problem, somebody tell me what the  
8   problem is, and it was like pulling teeth.

9           Q.    Did Jason ever say that he had been  
10  bullied by Mackey?

11          A.    No, ma'am.

12          Q.    Or that he had ever witnessed Mackey  
13  bullying someone?

14          A.    No, ma'am.

15          Q.    Did he tell you that Mackey was arrogant?

16          A.    He told me that others felt like he was.

17          Q.    Is that against the law --

18          A.    Arrogance?

19          Q.    -- being arrogant?

20          A.    No, ma'am.

21          Q.    Okay. And that's really subjective, isn't  
22  it?

23          A.    Absolutely.

24          Q.    Okay. Because, I mean, I could call you  
25  arrogant or some other businessman could call you



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1 arrogant, but you could be just confident, correct?

2 MS. DOWDLE: Object to the form.

3 THE WITNESS: Correct.

4 Q (By Ms. Ross) Was the Board fearful that  
5 all of your white employees would leave --

6 MS. DOWDLE: Object to the form.

7 Q (By Ms. Ross) -- if Mackey was named --

8 A. Ma'am, it was not -- no.

9 Q. Wouldn't you say you were unfair to Mackey  
10 if you had these reasons for disqualifying him for  
11 the position? Excuse me. I'm sorry.

12 A. That was my foot. I'm sorry.

13 Q. I'm sorry.

14 If you had these reasons for disqualifying  
15 him, but you never explored them with him to get his  
16 side?

17 MS. ROSS: Object to the form,  
18 mischaracterizes testimony. You may answer.

19 THE WITNESS: I don't know how to answer  
20 that because I was just trying to find out if  
21 there's anything to it. What is going on?  
22 What is the problem? And, yes, we had people  
23 worried that if Mackey got the job, they were  
24 going to lose their job and they were not  
25 white.

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1 Q. And to this day, we still don't have  
2 anyone who's filed any sort of complaint on  
3 bullying?

4 A. As far as I know, you're correct.

5 Q. And any other complaint that alleges that  
6 Mackey has violated any rule established by MCCB?

7 A. Correct.

8 Q. So going back to my question, you said  
9 that as far as education and experience are  
10 concerned, that you cannot say that Kell Smith was  
11 clearly more qualified than Mackey, and it was the  
12 18 months of experience that Kell gained as the  
13 interim that gave him an edge?

14 MS. DOWDLE: Object to the form,  
15 mischaracterizes testimony. You may answer.

16 THE WITNESS: I wouldn't word it like  
17 that, quite honestly, because I don't think it  
18 was the 18 months of experience that he gained.  
19 I think it was our witness of how things got  
20 better so much quicker. We went from the  
21 frying pan to a much better, smoother  
22 operation. Everybody's getting along,  
23 everybody seems happy with what's happening.  
24 Okay. Now we're fixing to have to go and hire  
25 somebody permanent, which gives us the risk of

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1           it going the other way. So we're saying, how  
2           do we keep things going smooth like they're  
3           going? Now, that's where I was. I can't speak  
4           for nine other people. I can only tell you  
5           where I was with this.

6           Q        (By Ms. Ross) Okay. But y'all deceived  
7           the public, right?

8                    MS. DOWDLE: Object to the form.

9           Q        (By Ms. Ross) When y'all claimed that  
10          y'all picked Kell because he was just going to be in  
11          there until y'all could find someone else. So y'all  
12          always knew that you were going to put somebody else  
13          in a position, correct?

14                   MS. DOWDLE: Object to the form.

15          Q        (By Ms. Ross) That's what y'all had  
16          claimed falsely, correct?

17                   MS. DOWDLE: Object to the form.

18                   THE WITNESS: No, ma'am.

19          Q        (By Ms. Ross) You falsely claimed that  
20          Kell was just going to be interim, correct?

21                   MS. DOWDLE: Object to the form.

22                   THE WITNESS: We had no idea that Kell  
23          would even consider applying for the job when  
24          we put him at interim. We put him at interim  
25          because I knew he didn't want the job.